What did I say? I was too numb to move, much less talk! There are times when even a fool knows enough to hold his peace, and this was one of them.

Presently the main man of the paper came in. His hair was rumpled; he looked annoyed.

"Stryker," said he, nodding me out of the conversation, "that chap I brought in here yesterday's a fake. Don't follow up his story. Silly joke on me. Not a burglar at all; friend of Graham, who used to live here. Went West years ago, and is back now to recuperate from a siege of typhoid fever. He's been playing burglar rôles on the stage, and Graham bet him he couldn't carry this thing through. Rot, you know!"

He dropped some mail on Stryker's desk and slammed the door again.

Stryker's mouth was still open when I raised my eyes to his. A thrill, or a shiver, or something, traveled up my back-bone, but it was welcome. Glad sort of a tremble, you understand—because Her brother wasn't anything worse than an actor, playing stupid jokes. I forgave him again.

Then the silliness of the whole thing struck Stryker and me at the same time, and I got a pretty clear picture of myself climbing that fire-escape!

Stryker brought his fist down on his desk—smash!

"Damn!" said he.

"I—I quite agree with you," said I.

DON ESTEVAN'S HONOR.*

By Eleanor M. Ingram.

It was held in keeping by a viking of the South and by another whom he brought over the sea.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

ESTEVAN DE LUCENA, cousin of Luís de Lucena, ruler of the island kingdom of Rocaverde, is left in command by the latter. Treason is discovered, but only one of the plotters, Gonsalvo by name, is apprehended. The ships come in, and Luís is informed of the matter by Estevan. That night Estevan is entrapped by one Mirando in a room where are assembled all the other conspirators, and is told of a dastardly plot to kill his cousin. Realizing the futility of resistance, he promises, on condition that Luís's life be spared, to shield the officers, who have had enough of plotting, and to release Gonsalvo. Luís, in anger, orders him into exile in the Quinta, on the other side of the island. Estevan's sister, Arria, lately returned from a convent, pleads in vain to go to him; Luís, unable to bear with the situation, puts to sea again.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE SHIP COMES IN.

THE periodical excitement being over, Rocaverde lapsed into its usual cheerful repose. The plump, rosy children rolled lazily on the door-steps or made excursions to the gleaming beach of white sea-sand, Padre Jacinto scolded and praised his flock with alternate zeal, and the stay-at-home men resumed their normal importance.

Rosa Paredes accepted temporarily the devotion of several young villagers, and announced her intention of marrying only a sailor with exactly the same confidence as that with which she always assured the sailors she could only care for a landsman.

But a few weeks after Lucena's departure the calm was again shaken into excitement. One morning the children came racing up from the shore with the cry that a strange ship was coming into the bay. Promptly the village was in an

uproar, the bolder spirits hurrying to the wharf, while the women congregated at doors or windows and made voluble outcry at their rashness.

Half a dozen boys were despatched post-haste to the castle, Juan Perez refusing the errand with ungracious scorn.

The strange ship came to anchor with every indication of friendliness, and proceeded to lower a single boat with reassuring slowness and dignity. Don Ruy de la Vega and the party from the castle clattered through the village and dismounted at the wharf just in time to receive their visitors.

And Don Ruy echoed the amazed gasp of his officers as he saw the central figure of the group—a girl, dainty, demure, with dark lashes sweeping pomegranate cheeks, and the stamp of the Castilian court in the very fall of her lace mantilla and the arch of her tiny shoe.

When greetings and hasty explanations were over, and the combined parties moved up the wharf before admiring Rocaverde, Juan Perez first caught sight of the stranger.

Not being hampered by conventions, he followed the inclination which the young officers had politely overcome, and stared in open delight. The lady met his eyes, and her own sparkled into roguish response behind the meshes of lace.

For once, news traveled quickly to Doña Soledad's wing of the castle. Don Ruy sent word to his mistress that guests had arrived from Castile and waited to see her. Perhaps even Doña Soledad possessed the pleasant weakness of curiosity, for there was no delay in admitting the visitors.

Arria was seated in a low chair at her aunt's side when the little procession entered, and her violet eyes widened slightly at sight of the feminine figure.

"*Señora,*" said Don Ruy, "I have the honor to present to you the Señorita Doña Floria Mendez y del Carpio, and this gentleman, Señor Julio Venegas, her escort and captain of her ship."

The girl dropped the clinging draperies as Doña Soledad rose to welcome her, and smiled with singular brightness. Beside her hostess and the stately Arria she seemed childishly small and radiant, and the wonderful dark eyes she lifted were at once soft and clear as stars.

"*Señora,*" she said, in a sweet, rippling voice, "that I invade your home without warning is indeed not my fault. My father was taking me to Sicily when he met the ships of Don Luís de Lucena, and as these gentlemen planned some expedition together, Don Luís suggested that you would give me your gracious care. If you undertake the charge, *señora,* I shall be more than grateful."

The ceremony and grace of the court blended charmingly with her natural frank sincerity. Won in spite of herself, Doña Soledad stooped and kissed the glowing cheek.

"I am pleased and honored by your father's confidence, Doña Floria," she replied with some warmth. "We knew each other years agone."

Floria smiled again.

"*Señora,* so *he* said—and that he might forget all else; but that, never."

The days when she knew Raimundo del Carpio were very agreeable recollections to Doña Soledad; she flushed the faint pink of gratified old age, and turned to introduce the two young girls.

The dull magnificence of the room and the primness of its inmates had not been without an effect even on Floria, and seeing Arria for the first time, she moved forward with impulsive delight.

"I thought I was the only girl," she exclaimed as Doña Soledad gave her attention to the captain. "I hope you will like me, indeed."

"I like every one," returned Arria a little coldly.

Floria raised her eyebrows.

"I do not, I am afraid. But when I do it is very much."

She flashed her quick smile into Arria's eyes, and turned to the departing men. Captain Venegas took leave of her with affectionate reluctance, and ever Ruy de la Vega's grim face relaxed as he watched.

Arria remained a silent spectator of the formalities of the reception, the selection of apartments, and the installation of the maid who attended the guest. But when Floria's great dark eyes appealed to her, their expression suddenly wistful, she relented and stayed with her in the severe bedchamber when Doña Soledad withdrew.

"I may open these windows? Oh, it

was all green and gold and blue as we came to the castle; must it all stay outside?"

"This is your room," Arria replied. "Let your maid do as you will. Doña Soledad does not like the strong light."

Floria herself pushed back the heavy curtains, and came back to look at her companion.

"You like it, surely," she exclaimed, with a quick breath. "How beautiful you are!"

Arria colored; the cry was a repetition of Estevan's first words when she arrived at Rocaverde, and the convent had not accustomed her to compliments.

"You are, also," she said, with a curious unwillingness to concede it.

"I? If I were ill-tempered I should be ugly; but you are all snow and gold. Sit down, please; let me learn this place with you here."

Arria obeyed, vaguely conscious of the absurdity of connecting ill temper with the sweet, frank face, all latent firmness and courage. Floria took her place opposite in one of the stiff, high-backed chairs, moving restlessly in its uncompromising discomfort.

"When did you meet our ships?" inquired Arria after a moment.

"A week ago. Don Luís de Lucena had given battle to some Moorish pirates a few days before, and he was pursuing two that had slipped away in the night. My father wished to go with him, and you see how they disposed of me." She laughed lightly.

"You saw Don Luís?"

"Yes; several times. He had been wounded; not seriously, but he carried his left arm in a sling. My father told him he had left his good fortune on shore with your brother."

Arria winced and paled.

"What did Don Luís answer?" she demanded.

"Only that Don Estevan was unable to leave Rocaverde. I have not seen him yet, Arria. Is he like you?"

"He is on the other side of the island. But you will not be three days in Rocaverde without hearing that story." Her lovely face hardened. "Did Don Luís please you?"

Floria looked at her wonderingly.

"I do not understand. Don Luís? I hardly know; he is so stern and imperious, I think I was afraid of him. Father told me he cared for no one in the world except Don Estevan, and it passed through my mind—you will not be angry?"

"No."

"That no one but another man could ever return the love of one so chill and harsh."

Arria rose abruptly, and kissed the other with her rare cordiality.

"Doña Soledad will want me," she said. "Floria, do not speak of Estevan to any one but me. By and by you will understand."

Floria wound her arms around the slim waist.

"I will do anything you wish if you will like me a little. I have a passion for being loved, and I think I have been petted all my life, Arria *mia*."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HEART OF AN IRIS.

ARRIA was right in believing that it would not be long before Floria heard Estevan's story. That same night the maid repeated the tale while she unbound her mistress's lengths of chestnut hair, adding to it all the exaggerations gathered from the other servants.

Floria, a Castilian reared to regard chivalrous honor as a very religion, listened with inexpressible horror and pity for his sister, tempered only by wonder at Lucena's leniency.

"And he is a prisoner now?" she asked thoughtfully.

"*Señorita,* yes and no; he is at his home, the old Quinta Lucerna, across the mountain. There is no one to watch him. The few servants who cared for the house when it was empty are still there, but my lord sent them no charge or command concerning Don Estevan."

Floria questioned no further. After she had dismissed the woman for the night she went out on her diminutive balcony. Under the moonlight the garden lay in fairyland loveliness; the ripple of a fountain mingled with the distant lapping of the waves on the beach; the quiet air was freighted with perfume.

Floria rested her round arms on the

rail, her dark eyes grave and pitiful. What was it like to be the sister of one so disgraced, to know that his very life hung on Lucena's caprice? Had Arria pleaded for him, she wondered, and so won his cousin's indulgence? Remembering Lucena's glance, she felt the conviction that no one living could move him in his anger. He had loved this unfaithful kinsman, too.

"*Ave Maria purisima!—Las diez; y todo es sereno!*"

The cry was startlingly close, and on a tower the dark figure of the sentinel showed distinct against the silver light. On the other side of the garden wall some one laughed.

"*Verdad,* Mirando, you shivered as though you felt the Atlantic wind in December," called Don Bernardo's lisping accents. "Did you never hear a sentry's call, perhaps?"

"It came so oddly in the dark," a stifled voice replied. "I detest their din at night."

Floria turned slowly and went within.

The next morning Doña Soledad provided her guest and ward with a chair on the dais between herself and Arria. A piece of embroidery, appallingly large and intricate, was placed in the dismayed Floria's hands as the day's occupation.

At first her new pity and interest in Arria, and the reflections of the night before, made the dull quiet bearable, but at noon she rebelled.

"Arria, let us go in the garden," she suggested, dropping the mass of bright silks in her lap.

The room contemplated her in mute astonishment.

"The sun is too hot, Doña Floria," said Doña Soledad immovably.

She sighed, and clasped her small hands behind her head.

"Yes, *señora.* But I am tired indeed."

"Presently we will lunch, and then we will take the siesta. You are not yet accustomed to our tropical climate."

"No, *señora.* I saw a little church as we passed through the village yesterday, all white, with rose-vines climbing over it; does one go there?"

"Certainly not, Doña Floria. Padre Jacinto visits our chapel four times a week."

Floria's dark eyes sparkled as they rested on the opposite wall.

"*Señora,* that is a beautiful guitar." Doña Soledad followed her gaze indifferently.

"It has not been touched for years. Carmen, bring it to Doña Floria."

The instrument had doubtless been wrested from oriental hands by some former Lucena; it was *El Aud* of Arabia, gleaming with the opalescent inlay of mother-of-pearl, its frets and pegs marked with the dull color of strange gems. Floria touched it caressingly, and put it in accord with gentle fingers.

"Play," murmured Arria idly.

"It is the guitar of some Eastern princess, the guitar of Zaraya the Fair that Israfel had breathed upon," answered Floria, the rich chords drifting through her words. "It will sing of courtyards in Fez where fountains splash all day long, of midnight in the Alhambra gardens; listen—it is sad as the nightingales of Zahara!"

There was no need to bid them listen; the women's needles had stopped, and even Doña Soledad was caught in the web of notes. Floria looked only at Arria, and the shadow and sympathy of the night before stole back with its moonlight, shutting out the watching room.

Something stirred deep in Arria's violet eyes as she listened—something strange and half awake. Floria had heard the story; she realized that. But it was not Estevan's face that rose with the music and set itself before her with new insistence.

When the young girl's soft fingers slipped from the strings Doña Soledad cleared her throat.

"The flowering trees are too oppressive," she remarked majestically. "My dear, I hope you will keep the guitar; and we shall always have pleasure in hearing you play."

But not even Floria could play always, and by the end of the first week she developed a dozen ways of coaxing Doña Soledad's attention from the inevitable embroidery. And perhaps that severe lady was not unwilling to watch the graceful courtly dances, or listen while the young girl sat chin in hand and related the wild tales learned from Moorish or Provençal ballad-singers.

It was when the hour of the siesta scattered the group that Floria one day drew Arria with her.

"I want to show you something," she declared. "Or, rather, I want you to show me."

She led the way past the usual boundaries, glancing back demurely. Arria paused with startled surprise.

"Out there?" she exclaimed. "We must not leave Doña Soledad's wing of the castle, Floria."

"Not far. Across this hall there is a wonderful room; I saw only a little of it the other day when Padre Jacinto left. Come!"

Arria yielded to the gentle pressure, and they crossed the hall. Floria pushed open the door, and they stood on the threshold.

The room was curiously still; the windows were open, and the noontide sun flooded the place, throwing a thousand varying tints of rich violet and azure from floor and walls and hangings, but the sense of desertion clung there. A book lay face downward on the table, a silken scarf swung from the arm of a low chair, yet both girls felt instinctively that they need not fear the return of an owner.

"It is Don Luís's room, perhaps?" suggested Floria.

"No," said Arria decisively. Without knowing why, she was assured that Lucena's stamp was not here.

"No, *he* would not care for this sea of lapis-lazuli, this heart of an iris. But it is beautiful."

Floria sat down and rested her head against the velvet cushions. "Arria, you are so dignified; one would think you had passed a year at the court, not I. Why, there is another guitar!"

Arria glanced at the instrument leaning against the divan and back again to the smiling face.

"It is a man's room," continued Floria merrily, leaning to pick up the book. "See only those old Toledo swords, and that chart of some strange voyage! I would I were a cavalier, Arria *mia;* I should challenge the master of all this to a duel, and marry you, and never, never go back to Castile!"

She opened the book, and gave an exclamation.

"It is Italian! I know this very well, this Florentine romance. The pages are crushed. Who in the castle reads Italian, Arria? I think—I think I should like the owner of this room."

But Arria made no reply; she had moved to the table, and was looking down at a gauntlet that had lain beside the book, her fair face almost repellant in its bitterness of contempt. Floria rose, but quicker than her movement was the one with which Aria put her hand over the crest stamped on the white kid.

"We should not be here," she said imperiously. "Floria, come away."

The rustle of the silver-fringed curtain checked the answer; they turned together to confront a man who stood in the doorway.

"*Señor,*" gasped Floria, scarlet with confusion. "Your room—"

The man faltered, almost equally embarrassed, with his eyes fixed on Arria.

"No, *señorita,*" he denied hurriedly. "I—the room was Don Estevan's."

The Dante slipped from Floria's grasp.

"Oh!" she cried.

Arria's glance silenced her.

"Señor Mirando, have the goodness to open the door," she directed calmly. "Come, Floria."

Mirando held back the curtain without a word as they passed out.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE GATE OF DREAMS.

"SEÑORITA!"

Juan sat up abruptly, shaking off the rosy snow of fallen blossoms that the fresh breeze was scattering.

"*Señorita!*" came the call again, with even more coaxing gaiety.

He looked around, puzzled and doubting his ears, then up at the wall over his head. He gasped and stared in speechless admiration.

Floria regarded him contentedly across the tangle of vines, quite indifferent to the glaring sun that transmuted her hair to a halo of copper and bronze.

"*Señora?*" the boy stammered.

"You are the first person I have seen for two months who was not embroidering," she declared. "You are the boy who stood on the wharf, yes? Talk to me, *señorita.*"

"*Señora,* I am Juan Perez."

"*Señor,* I am Floria del Carpio," she mimicked gravely. "That road over there leads to the village?"

"Yes, *señorita,*" he answered, breaking into a slow smile as he met her eyes.

"I should like to go there and visit the pretty women and play with the dimpled babies. I am smothering in there." She waved an explanatory hand toward the castle. "Every one is asleep; I saw you from a window and came out."

"The wall—"

"Oh, I am standing on a bench. I shall be obliged to tell Padre Jacinto that I have disobeyed Doña Soledad and deceptively pretended to take a nap; then I will ask him not to tell, and he will not. I have learned to know him very well in two months, perhaps?"

Juan laughed delightedly, and moved nearer.

"Yes, *señorita.* I, too, wheedle him when things get a little wrong. Don Bernardo also I can coax my way, and even —on occasion—Don Ruy. Now if it were my lord!" He shrugged his shoulders expressively. "I would not be under your wall, *señorita,* if he were at home."

Floria's face sobered slightly.

"Don Luís is so harsh?" she asked.

"Every one fears him."

"I wish he would return," she said mischievously. "*I* am not afraid of him, much. Does nothing exciting ever happen at Rocaverde?"

Juan paled under his warm tan.

"When the ships are in, yes," he replied. "*Señorita,* I hope nothing happens this time."

She recollected, and arched her delicate brows.

"You mean to Don Estevan?"

He nodded sullenly. Floria held out a finger-tip to a diminutive green-and-gold beetle who was feebly struggling on its back.

"If this were Castile," she reflected aloud, "and Don Estevan de Lucena had betrayed his cousin and overlord—"

Juan raised his defiant gaze suddenly to her face.

"Did you ever see Don Estevan, *señorita?*"

"No."

"In the village we call him *El Sonriente,* the Smiling One. His eyes were the sea in the morning sun, laughing and kind beyond the telling. There was no one who did not turn to him in their hour of trouble. *Señorita,* if you had seen him you would not want him to die."

"Certainly I do not want that," she protested. "But I think it is for Don Luís I am sorry, Juan."

"For my lord?" he exclaimed incredulously. "You are sorry for my lord, *señorita?*"

Floria carefully pushed the beetle over the edge and watched him fly away, then folded her arms on the broad wall and looked down at the boy.

"'The flash of steel is in his eyes, but it shines from the simitar a friend left in his heart,'" she quoted with quaint gravity. "Juanito, an Arab of Grenada who was hostage at our court once told me a legend of a great prince who visited the City Beyond, one night, in a dream. A wonderful city it was, of pearl and jasper and gold, but even as with us there were many poor and hideous houses.

"'And which of these palaces is mine?' asked the prince. The spirit who led him pointed to a half-built tower of dark stone, splashed here and there with crimson and moldered with clinging damp. 'That!' cried the astonished prince. 'Who dared build for me this dungeon?' 'You yourself,' answered the spirit. 'Each word and act of yours lays one more stone in that construction.'

"'Then what saint dwells in that palace of diamond whose last turret is just rising in place?'

"'That,' said the spirit, 'is the life-work of your gardener, who died to-night.' The prince was silent a while. 'And if I try,' he asked humbly, 'can I build better, and tear down that evil place?' The spirit covered its eyes with its wings. 'Alas! poor mortal, you may build the rest of your tower of radiant light, but not Allah himself can change that which is already done.' That dawn, when the prince awoke, his attendants recorded that he wept." She paused, and the fascinated Juan regarded her with wide black eyes.

"You mean, *señorita?*" he questioned earnestly.

"I mean, Juanito, that Don Estevan has built as he would, but that Don Luís

suffers for no fault of his own. Do not lay your first stones wrong, my Juan, through sympathy."

The boy checked her movement to retreat with an eager cry.

"Ah, no, *señorita,* listen first. I cannot bear that you should believe I excuse Don Estevan. I would defend and fight for my lord, although I fear and do not love him. We are all loyal, we of Rocaverde. But one cannot stop caring for some one just because they are not good."

"That is true," she assented warmly. "Juan—"

An exclamation of shocked amazement rose from the garden behind.

"Floria! What are you doing?"

She turned hastily, and was confronted by Arria's dismayed face. A rustle and patter announced Juan's retirement.

"Only you?" said Floria joyously. "Doing? I am coming down, unless you want to look over, too."

"Look over?"

Floria stepped from the bench and surveyed her teasingly.

"Why not? Do you never tire of the right side of the wall, Arria?"

"You were talking with some one."

"With a boy—only a little boy. What a mistress of the maids you would have been, Arria! If you knew where I was before I came to the garden, what would you say?"

Arria met her glance with some misgiving.

"Where?" she demanded.

Floria sat down and veiled her eyes reminiscently behind their dark lashes.

"I went out into the real castle, and met Don Ruy de la Vega. He showed me so many things; it is another country out there, Arria. The lofty rooms with their arches and pillars of inlaid woods and stone, the glowing colors and soft luxurious lights; I loved it all. And he told me stories—stories that carry the breath of the sea and the sting of the salt wind. They are brave, brave, your Lucenas, and this last Don Luís also. I wished again that I were a cavalier. I could fight for a chief like that."

"You are mad," interrupted Arria, pale with anger. "You had no right to go there—no right."

Floria looked up, startled and frightened.

"What do you mean, Arria—what have I said? Oh—" She broke off at the idea that her words might have seemed a reproach to Estevan.

"You knew Doña Soledad would not permit that," Arria went on, struggling for self-control. "You knew—"

A faint cry rang from the village below, swelling to a great cheer. For an instant the noonday hush quivered to the distant uproar, then a single clear bugle-note sounded from the castle tower.

"What is it?" Floria questioned.

Arria released her hand from the other's excited grasp, and drew back.

"The ships are in," she said slowly.

"The ships!" cried Floria, springing to her feet. "Let us go back. Arria," she flung her arms about her companion, "you will not be angry, when my father will take me away so soon?"

"No," was the low answer. "I will not be angry, Floria, since you are going away so soon."

"Because I am not sure that I shall be very happy. I never told you, Arria, but my father took me from Castile because one of the great nobles wished to marry me, and I could not bear it. He is very powerful with the king, that man, and he may force my father either to give me to him or put me in a convent. Sometimes I am afraid, afraid; it is then you say I laugh too much."

Arria caught her breath, interested in spite of the quivering expectation that mounted through her as the clamor grew in village and castle, proclaiming the master's arrival.

"Why will you not marry this noble?" she asked. "He is so hateful to you?"

"No—yes; I do not know. But when I marry some one I want to care for him." She regarded Arria with wide mystic eyes—eyes that betrayed how often she had lingered at the gate of dreams. "If the duke persists I must be shut in a convent for always—in the gray walls, out of the sun."

"You love some one else?" Arria demanded bruskly.

"No—oh, no!" The crimson rushed hotly to the sweet, earnest face. "It is not that; it is that all my life I have waited for something strange and wonderful, and I must wait still."

If it had been two months earlier

Floria's confidence would have met only scornful incomprehension, but Arria was learning much.

"You would be wiser to marry the king's favorite," she replied, yet not without kindness in her tone, and she held out her hand to the other as they turned back.

CHAPTER XI.

MISUNDERSTANDING.

LUCENA did not visit Doña Soledad's apartments until his chosen hour of sunset. There was much to be done—orders to be given, reports to be heard; moreover, he spent hours alone in his room.

He did not ask of Estevan, and no one ventured to mention his name, especially as there was nothing to tell. During the long weeks there had been no sign that the old Quinta was not still deserted; no protest or complaint had come across the dividing mountain.

That Lucena had not forgotten was perhaps most evident in the cold aversion of his glance when it rested on Ruy de la Vega—an aversion which he did not permit to affect his confidence in the old officer, but which was none the less distinct. Gomez remained in the background as much as possible; he had still nightmares when he felt Lucena's grasp on his shoulder. Even Don Bernardo was more comfortable when not in sight of his chief.

Lucena himself was paler than before, and the line between his level brows had deepened. The sailors of his ship could tell of a sullen recklessness passing even his usual daring in storm and battle; of long nights spent on wind-swept decks, when the cordage strained singing overhead and everything gleamed wet with rain and flying spray. Sometimes the white dawn would find him still leaning against the rail, and these vigils had left in his face the silence, the menace, and loneliness of the ocean itself.

When he entered Doña Soledad's room that evening a thrill of interest ran round the demure circle. Floria had already learned that her father's ship was not with the others—she had received a letter from him through Lucena—and she watched the scene with contented relief.

Perhaps for the first time in her life, Arria had taken thought of her own beauty and imitated a little of Floria's dainty coquetry of dress. The touches her pride would permit were very few; the narrow chain of sapphires that encircled her slim throat and echoed the tints of her eyes, the cluster of deep-blue flowers in her golden hair, no more. But consciousness of them aided the strange confusion that shook her.

Lucena greeted his mother with the usual lack of emotion on either side, then turned to Arria.

"Are you also rejoiced to see me, my cousin?" he asked, with a chilling irony of which he was scarcely aware, so purely was it of defense and not attack.

"I am glad you have returned safely, *señor*," she answered in her slow, cool voice.

No ordeal could have been more bitter to Lucena than this home-coming, from the moment when he involuntarily sought Estevan's face on the wharf to the hours spent in his lonely room; and now Arria's calm indifference of tone fell on a spirit already quivering with impatient suffering.

"I thank you," he said abruptly, and moved to Floria's side—Floria, who smiled at him in a frank welcome that was yet touched with shyness.

"Shall you grieve very much to be Rocaverde's prisoner for some months, Doña Floria?" he inquired.

"Every one is most kind to me, *señor*," she replied a little wistfully. "There could be no place more pleasant to me while my father is absent."

Lucena glanced round the shaded room and back to the glowing face which, without Arria's regular loveliness, still seemed to gather and hold all the warmth and color of the place.

"It is different from Castile," he remarked significantly.

"Perhaps that is why I am happy, *señor*."

The sternness of his expression lightened as he met her clear eyes.

"Doña Floria has many resources for amusement," Doña Soledad observed. "She frequently is kind enough to entertain us with her guitar and with tales which, while chiefly concerning pagans, are very diverting."

Lucena and Floria looked at each other and smiled together.

"Doña Floria, may I ask that you will let me be diverted some day?" he said.

Not seldom had Floria played *Scheherezade* to a brilliant circle of King Juan's ladies and courtiers; she answered now, readily and naturally:

"*Señor,* I shall be only glad if I can return one of the many happy hours I owe to you and Doña Soledad."

"I and my house are yours," he replied courteously. "*Señoras,*" his voice changed as he saluted the other two women, "permit me to bid you good night, with all gratitude for your ardent welcome."

He did not look at Arria as she regarded him with eyes that glittered behind their curtaining lashes, nor did he notice the movement with which she drew the knot of flowers from her hair and deliberately crushed them in her hand.

An exclamation from Floria first called attention to the purple that stained the slender white fingers and dripped on the dark velvet robe.

Lucena paused outside the door, with a sick distaste for any place whither he might go. He would sail again in a few days, he decided; Rocaverde was unendurable. Presently he crossed to a low divan at the opposite end of the hall and sat down, resting his arm on the sill of the open window and gazing over the garden with unseeing eyes.

He did not see the figure that came in by the other entrance, and after a brief hesitation approached his side.

"*Benedicite,* my son," ventured a gentle voice.

Lucena turned.

"You, Padre Jacinto? You are away from the village later than usual; has Rocaverde sent you for my authority to enforce your own?"

"No, my son; Rocaverde is good, very good; not perfect, but what will you?"

Lucena surveyed him questioningly, and waited. Padre Jacinto looked at the floor, his kindly old face troubled and half doubtful.

"It is not the village," he resumed. "It is of you, my son, that I would speak. We learn much that cannot be repeated, or even hinted; but you should not be in this solitary hall alone."

"Another conspiracy, father?"

"No, no," he denied. "Not a conspiracy; only — sometimes one secret enemy is more to be dreaded than many banded together. My son, you are very severe, and those who have wronged you dare not rest."

Lucena made no exclamation, but his face became gray in its pallor.

"I understand you," he said, his quiet tone unshaken. "And if Estevan tries again I hope he succeeds. Go, now, father; I thank you."

"My son, my son!" exclaimed Padre Jacinto, seriously alarmed and dismayed. "I spoke no names. Indeed it was not Don Estevan I meant—"

Lucena silenced him with a gesture.

"Hush! Your confidence is safe, father. I understand; go—no one shall suffer for this."

"But—" began Padre Jacinto desperately; then he yielded to Lucena's glance and retreated in mute distress.

Lucena looked round the hall, with its dusky shadows and dim corners masked by draperies, then slowly turned his back to it and resumed his position at the window.

Long after darkness had fallen completely he still sat there motionless.

CHAPTER XII.

ALENYA OF THE SEA.

THE rooms that had been Estevan's possessed an entrance on one of the main halls as well as the unused door opening opposite Doña Soledad's suite. Lucena's brief command that these rooms be untouched and unentered had been given long before, and so strictly had it been obeyed that not even a window had been closed against the sun or rain.

It was, therefore, with profound amazement that he stopped in the large hall two or three days after his return and stared at the swaying curtain of the long-shut door. Not the least breeze stirred the noonday heat; moreover, there had been the faint grind of turning hinges. Who in Rocaverde dared challenge an order so given?

Lucena stood still for a moment. Slowly Padre Jacinto's warning crept to the surface of his thoughts, and with this

came recollection of the unused door near the seat where he had been alone. Was that what the *padre* had feared? He crossed swiftly and opened the door.

Some one drew back hastily to the shelter of a column, and in the stillness the stifled gasp of dismay was distinctly audible. It was characteristic of the autocracy to which the lords of Rocaverde were accustomed that Lucena made no movement in pursuit.

"Come here," he said, scarcely raising his tone from its usual level.

The man obeyed, as undoubtedly Estevan would have obeyed if Lucena's momentary fancy had been correct. There was an unpleasant pause.

"You will explain why you are here, Mirando."

"My lord—" faltered the man, then broke off.

"I am waiting."

"Pardon, my lord, I was in search of something."

"Of what?"

Pedro Mirando had more than one reason for shrinking from the keen gray eyes. His answer was an inspiration of the moment, suggested by an object he had noticed in first entering.

"My lord, that."

Lucena followed the pointing hand with a rapid glance.

"Give it to me!"

Mirando picked the snowy heap from the floor and presented it—a triangle of filmy lace that twined itself around Lucena's fingers and exhaled a faint sweet scent.

"My lord, I saw Doña Floria drop it here, and when the maid told me her mistress had lost a favorite mantilla I remembered and came to seek it."

"Doña Floria was in this room?"

"With Doña Arria, my lord. I saw them coming out, and held back the curtain."

"And who constituted you Doña Floria's attendant, or made that an excuse for disregarding my order?"

Mirando was quick to perceive and seize the explanation most likely to conceal his real object and present a lesser fault.

"My lord," he stammered with an embarrassment not altogether feigned, for the gaze upon him was sufficiently disconcerting, "I meant no harm; it was so pleasant to oblige Doña Floria—"

Lucena raised his eyebrows with supercilious contempt, and paused an instant before replying. It was quite possible that Floria's bright prettiness had captivated the man, and that he had risked this merely for a chance of seeing her again.

"I shall inquire of Doña Floria if it is as you say," he said curtly. "Another time, pray refrain from thinking concerning an order of mine. You may go."

Mirando retired more than willingly. Before following, Lucena looked reluctantly round the room, never more desolate than under the morning sun its owner had so loved. Faded blossoms had been wafted through the windows, and now dotted with dull brown the gleaming floor and dark rugs. A crystal vase holding some withered hyacinth stems stood on the table; noting this, Lucena's eye fell on the glove that lay beside. He gave a faint exclamation and took a step forward, his face flashing, not into Arria's cold scorn, but into passionate tenderness and warmth. He put out his hand impulsively, then let it fall again to his side. After a moment he turned and left the room.

That it was the hour for the siesta, or any other hour, was not a matter which Lucena was accustomed to consider when he wished to carry out an idea. He entered Doña Soledad's apartments precisely as usual, only to find the large room deserted save for two of the most ancient waiting-women.

"Do not disturb Doña Soledad," he directed the one who moved to the door. "I wish to see Doña Floria."

The message was a trifle more imperious than the king would have sent, but Lucena was blind with the old pain. He stood looking out at the almond-tree where he had said farewell to Arria until a light footfall aroused him.

Floria swept her graceful salute, with a smile all sunshine.

"*Señor,* I am glad to find some one else in Rocaverde who does not sleep at noon," she declared laughingly.

"I forgot that custom," returned Lucena. "I find the nights so much too long that daytime sleep did not occur to me. I have disturbed you?"

"No, *señor;* on the contrary."

She took her usual place, and he sat down opposite, curiously tired and willing to escape his own thoughts. The two waiting-women had discreetly returned to their work.

Floria waited a little, in a silence full of sympathy for the other's mood, then took the guitar that leaned against her chair and lightly touched the strings.

Lucena shivered and looked up.

"Pardon, Doña Floria; yes, you will fulfil your promise?"

"Shall I? Then I will play for you the song with which Alenya of the Sea used to charm the sadness from the spirit of the king."

"Tell me, first, who was Alenya."

"You do not know that story, *señor?* Very well, I will try to repeat it as an Arab hostage at our court once told it to me.

"Long ago, before the beauty of Cava brought the Moors across Gibraltar into Spain, there lived in the East a king named Selim the Sorrowful. His kingdom was vast, his people contented; all the country laughed except the ruler.

"Ever he grieved for a thing unknown. a want undefined and unsatisfied. Wise men and temples were questioned in vain; none could tell the king's desire or cure it. And his dark, wistful face came to be accepted as a thing usual and royal.

"One day, when the king walked alone in his garden by the sea, a strange mist crept over land and water, silvery, opalescent, wonderful. He stood watching. Suddenly a gigantic wave arose and swept curling to his feet, where it broke with a great sound.

"When the glittering foam and spray fell away again a girl was standing on the shore, clad in the floating gray of the mist, girdled and crowned with soft, dim pearls. Her lustrous eyes were green as the heart of the ocean, and as the king gazed into them his sorrow shrank and fled.

"'Who are you, desire of mine?' asked Selim. 'Alenya of the Sea,' she answered him, and her voice was as the lap of the waves on a summer night. Then the king took her in his arms and bore her to his palace."

"And she sang to him?"

"She sang to him, *señor.* Never was a change more marvelous; in all the kingdom there was no man so happy as Selim the king. Day and night, night and day, he lingered by the sea-maiden. Great prosperity came to the land, the fields yielded double crops, it seemed the king's smile was a very sunshine of the South.

"But by and by superstitious dread fell upon the people, and the jealous priests fostered it. Strange, strange and weirdly sweet was the music that drifted from Alenya's apartments. There came a day when the country demanded that Selim put away the evil enchantress or die. One month they gave him for the choice."

The notes idly touched at intervals slipped into a singular cadence.

"The men of the East are weak, Doña Floria. He banished the sea-maiden?"

"No, *señor;* he chose death, and a month with Alenya."

"If he lived one month according to his will few lives can equal his."

"That is true, *señor.* But never was such a month as this, when the lonely man still possessed his love and the wearied king had found an excitement. Selim stepped too near the bar that prevents perfect happiness on earth. When the end of the four weeks came—" She paused, leaning over the guitar, her red lips parted, one diminutive foot poised on the cushioned footstool.

"They died?"

"*Señor,* Alenya sang to the king for the last time. Ah, I cannot play you that lost music; it was so sad that if it were written the paper would dissolve in tears. When it ceased the king slept, and Alenya went back to the sea and the mist, alone. Later came the people and awakened him with their rejoicing, but he had forgotten."

"Forgotten!"

"Yes, *señor,* for Alenya's last song had swept her from his mind. From his mind, not his heart; he was again Selim the Sorrowful, yearning for the thing he did not know.

"Often, often, he wandered along the shore, suffering, uncomprehending. But the night he died the attendants found the print of a small wet hand on the pillow where rested the king's silver head."

With the last words came the promised music, startling minor chords whose very richness was half discordant, strung

on a fine thread of melody that seemed too frail to bind them.

Lucena listened, caught in one of those lulls which briefly visit the most stormy life, and are less peaceful than the cessation of pain.

When Floria ended he approached, almost with indifference, the subject that had brought him.

"Doña Floria, if Selim could have heard you he would have ceased to regret the sea-maiden. To say that I thank you is not enough, yet there is no more. Perhaps I may pay my debt another way; have you not recently lost an object you prized?"

"No, *señor,*" replied Floria, wondering.

"No? Not one of the dainty trifles you ladies cherish?"

She shook her head in puzzled denial.

"Ah, then Mirando told me a falsehood," said Lucena, with perfect serenity. "He is very imprudent."

But Floria caught the steel-cold flash that crossed his eyes, and realized promptly that she had innocently laid a heavy charge against some one.

"*Señor,* you are displeased!" she exclaimed frankly. "Will you not let me know what I have said? If I have forgotten, or do not understand, I might convict some one unawares."

Lucena contemplated her an instant, then lowered his voice beyond the hearing of the women.

"Doña Floria, this morning I found Mirando in a room that should be closed. In excuse he alleged that he had gone there in search of a mantilla which your maid missed, and which he had seen you drop when you left the place with my cousin Arria. Is this true?"

"I did go once to the violet room, *señor,* not knowing it was—closed," she answered. "I remember now that the lace was missing; very probably my maid mentioned it."

"And Mirando opened the door for you, and so saw it fall?"

Floria checked herself on the verge of saying that Mirando had entered in ignorance of their presence. She had learned enough during her two months at Rocaverde to feel a sincere pity for any one who incurred Lucena's anger, and she saved Mirando out of feminine sympathy for the defenseless.

"He opened the door, *señor;* he could easily have seen it."

Lucena's brow relaxed.

"Once more I thank you, Doña Floria, and ask pardon for questioning you."

He rose and took the lace from the table where he had laid it on arriving.

"It has gathered the dust of the disused place," he added rather sadly. "Take it back to your brightness, *señorita.*"

But Floria shrank back in swift repugnance, and it slipped to the floor between them.

"No, *señor,*" she refused hurriedly. "I could not wear it now."

Lucena looked at her in surprise, and as their eyes met he saw that hers were full of tears.

After he had gone one of the women approached the young girl.

"*Señorita,* if you please, Berta and I will not speak of my lord's visit," she offered.

"Why?" inquired Floria simply.

The woman hesitated.

"*Señorita,* Doña Arria will be vexed."

The ready laughter danced back to Floria's face.

"Vexed? She herself has told me that no man in Rocaverde dared vex Don Luís, and should I risk it, a friendless stranger? It is no jest to say he frightens me."

"Doña Arria is a Lucena," murmured the woman sagely.

CHAPTER XIII.

STEEL ON STEEL.

A WEEK after his visit to Floria, Lucena sat reading in the great octagon of horseshoe arches that formed the upper hall. From the center, the broad stairs ran down into the hall below, which rang, as usual, with voices and laughter and the passing of many feet.

Above, it was comparatively quiet; the sunshine glinted across the myriad tints of walls and hangings and flickered in a quivering stream of light around Lucena's bent head. He did not notice the small figure that had approached until Floria's voice aroused him.

"*Señor!*"

Lucena looked up and rose.

"You, Doña Floria? I am honored. Will you sit?"

Reassured by his matter-of-fact courtesy, she came nearer, smiling at him with brilliant, excited eyes.

"*Señor,* if Doña Soledad finds me here I shall be scolded. But you have not come again to our wing of the castle, and I feared you would sail without my seeing you."

"If Doña Soledad discovers you I will find an excuse," answered Lucena, returning her smile with a gentleness which few but Estevan had ever encountered. "Is there some way I can serve you, Doña Floria?"

"Yes, *señor;* send me away. Oh, not far, not from Rocaverde; only somewhere where I may have sunlight and the fresh wind. Doña Soledad has been kind, but I cannot bear the long days of embroidering when one may not leave one's chair. I have tried; told them my stories, played the guitar, coaxed them to dance with me. *Señor,* for months to come—it is appalling!"

She was too generous to tell of Arria's new animosity and Doña Soledad's disapproving silence, which had made the last week unendurable. But it was not necessary; the appeal was peculiarly apt to touch the viking Lucena.

"Where can I send you?" he mused.

"*Señor,* I have talked to your governor, Don Ruy de la Vega. His sisters live near the top of the mountain—two old ladies. Could I go to them?"

"You would be contented there?"

"Yes; oh, yes. May I, *señor,* without offending Doña Soledad?"

"You shall go," he returned. "And I will tell Don Ruy that you are to be at liberty in your eery. For Doña Soledad my caprice shall be sufficient explanation. You are satisfied, Doña Floria?"

She held out both hands impulsively, her face radiant.

"Ah, *señor!*"

Lucena touched his lips to one of the small hands, and stood watching as she vanished between the curtains. He was thinking of other laughing eyes that had met his in a declaration of need for the free wind and the sweep of the sea. He sighed impatiently and turned, to see Arria leaning against the window on the other side of the hall.

She had followed Floria, of course, and had witnessed the little scene without comprehending. Never again could she claim her old indifference to those around her.

Lucena, looking, recognized a wrath equal to his own, a passion that burned like flame. In two strides he reached her side, and caught her in his arms.

"So, my cousin, you care!" he exclaimed exultantly. "You *care!*"

"Floria—" she gasped.

"You imagine I could find my mate in that dainty child? Look at me!"

She lifted her head and looked into his gray eyes, her own unflinching.

After a moment Lucena stooped and kissed her fiercely.

"You will send her away?" she demanded, unconscious that she was seconding Floria's own plea.

"If you wish it."

"Yes."

"I had meant to sail to-night; now, I stay to claim my wife. You shall marry me to-morrow, Arria."

Very slowly she drew herself from his arms.

"To-morrow, if you choose, except for Estevan," she answered.

Lucena's face darkened.

"What has he to do with us?" he asked. "Can I not forget him even for an hour?"

"I'm his sister," declared Arria firmly.

"And I his cousin. Our disgrace will be neither more nor less when you are my wife."

His imperious tone brought her eyes to his in flashing challenge; already the similarity between them stirred the inevitable antagonism.

"You do not understand," she said coolly. "Estevan's judge cannot be my husband; I cannot marry you while he waits your pleasure."

His brows contracted in an anger born of long endurance.

"If I did not kill him that first day, do you think I am likely to do so now?" was the harsh question.

"No. But I ask you to do more; send him away from Rocaverde, and let him find an unbranded life in the world outside. Set him free."

"Never!" he said, his face setting like steel.

"It is my price," she stated quietly.

Lucena smiled, not moving.

"If I want you I will take you, Arria."

"You have the power. You do not want me if I am not willing."

"You love me, my cousin."

"I am not sure whether I love you or hate you," she retorted. "But I will never be your wife unless you set Estevan free."

"I will not."

"Why?"

He was silent, looking at her with an expression which few men would have cared to provoke.

"Why?" she repeated. "Because you want to punish him; because you have delight in keeping him a prisoner on this island where the least child would shrink from him?"

"There can scarcely be any other reason," he replied coldly. "And he deserves it."

Floria would have divined the truth from sympathy; to Arria the knowledge came in a swift moment of intuition.

"Is that it?" she asked keenly. "Or is it that you still care for him too much to let him go beyond your reach?"

"It is not for you to question me," exclaimed Lucena, white with wrath. "Estevan is my prisoner, and will remain so. Either you become my wife tomorrow, or I sail. Choose!"

"You will sail, then."

"Very well."

They looked at each other, and with a quick movement he caught her in his arms again.

"If ever you tire of me, my cousin," he said under his breath, "tell me, and I will offer you my dagger and my heart; but treachery I cannot bear again."

"Luís!" she cried, for the moment as feminine as Floria could have been.

He kissed her, then put her from him, and left the hall.

(To be continued.)

LOVE AND SCRAPPY SCRAGGS.

By Johnston McCulley.

OF a vision which spoilt the aim of a dead shot and afterward transported him to heaven.

SCRAPPY SCRAGGS, laboring up the narrow, one-man trail that ran from the spring in the ravine to the cabin, came suddenly upon an apparition.

Usually, when coming suddenly upon apparitions, Scrappy pulled a gun and opened hostilities. But this time he did not. Instead, he put the bucket of water down in the middle of the trail, squeezed himself against the bank, and

invitation, but did as Scrappy directed. The nose of the apparition was somewhat in the air, and the apparition's fingers were trembling as they clutched nervously at the apparition's skirt.

Scrappy Scraggs watched the back of the apparition until it was lost to view at a bend of the trail, then he stepped into the clearing and picked up the bucket.

"Well, for th' love of lucre!" said Scrappy Scraggs.

As for the apparition, when it reached the bend in the trail it started to walk faster, and soon broke into a run. Along